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Clinton to Push Child-Support Enforcement Idea

Welfare Talk Scheduled Today; Plan Would Link Driver's License Eligibility, Parents' Obligations

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President Clinton today will launch a public campaign to make parents who fail to meet their child-support obligations ineligible for driver's licenses, administration officials said.

Nineteen states already use driver's licenses as a tool against so-called deadbeat dads, but the administration's proposal to nationalize that approach as part of welfare reform has so far gotten nowhere in Congress.

Clinton plans to make the case this morning in a speech to the National Association of Counties. Administration officials said the address, which will deal broadly with the federal government's role in helping people in poverty, will be an effort to put Clinton at the center of the welfare reform debate, which in recent months has been dominated by the more far-reaching rhetoric and proposals of Republicans.

Clinton is set to announce in his speech that Ohio will be the 25th state to receive a waiver from the federal government to experiment with its welfare rules. The announcement is intended to remind people that Clinton has been a supporter of innovation in welfare rules, and not the defender of the status quo that he is often portrayed in opposition rhetoric.

But an administration official said Clinton is determined not to strike a tone too controversial. To the contrary, the official said, his message is that welfare reform should be "rescued from the jaws of politics" and that he is eager to work with Republicans.

This is in contrast to Clinton's approach on issues such as the Republican crime bill, in which Clinton has threatened vetoes if the Congress passes laws that would undo legislation to hire more police officers.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), at a news conference in the Capitol, said the "objective reality is that there is no federal solution" to the welfare problem. He said that House Republicans want to give states the flexibility to experiment; "we believe it is important to allow 50 different experiments to try out and see what works."

Gingrich asked why the press did not "laugh off the stage" Democrats who attacked the Republican plan. "I don't understand how anybody can allow a liberal Democrat, standing in front of the monstrosity they have created—their public housing projects that are death traps for the poor, their public schools that are illiteracy traps for the poor," to defend the system. "Walk through Washington, D.C.—$9,600 per child in the schools and we don't teach them? It's spent on bureaucracy. It's spent on red tape. It's spent on a chauffeured limousine. It's spent on lawyers, but the children aren't being educated."

School officials said last night that while the $9,600 per child figure has been mentioned on the Hill, the actual cost of educating each child in the D.C. school system is $7,300—the highest in the nation.

Gingrich lauded Massachusetts Gov. William F. Weld (R) and Virginia Gov. George Allen (R), who appeared at the news conference with him, for their new welfare programs that call for putting recipients to work within 60 and 90 days, respectively. States can provide "better delivery [of welfare services] with more local concern at dramatically lower costs," he said.

Meanwhile, the Agriculture Department sent a letter to the House Agriculture Committee objecting to a committee measure that would curb spending in the federal food stamp program. The food stamp revisions, which the committee is to take up today, are scheduled to be included in a comprehensive welfare measure to be put together by the House Rules Committee and sent to the House floor later this month.

The department charged that the committee's bill would "eliminate the national nutritional safety net. . . . Nutrition needs do not vary from state to state, yet the bill would allow each of the states to set vastly different eligibility standards and nutrition benefits for single mothers with children."

Clinton's championing of the license revocation provision comes on the heels of unsuccessful Democratic efforts last week to have such a provision included in the Ways and Means welfare bill.

BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

At news conference on welfare are House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer (R-Tex.), left, GOP Govs. Allen and Weld, and Speaker Gingrich.